Khmu language

Khmu [kʰmuʔ] is the language of the Khmu people of the northern Laos region. It is also spoken in adjacent areas of Vietnam, Thailand and China. Khmu lends its name to the Khmuic branch of the Austroasiatic language family, the latter of which also includes Khmer and Vietnamese. Within Austroasiatic, Khmu is often cited as being most closely related to the Palaungic and Khasic languages.[6] The name "Khmu" can also be seen romanized as Kmhmu, Khmu', Kammu, or Khamuk in various publications or alternatively referred to by the name of a local dialect.

Kmhmu''	
Kmhmu'	
Native to	Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, China, United States, France, Canada
Ethnicity	Kmhmu'
Native speakers	(3.500.000 cited 1990–2015 census)[1][2]
Language family	Austroasiatic ■ Khmuic ■ **Kmhmu''**
Writing system	Lao, Latin
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	Either: `kjg` – Khmu `khf` – Buddhist Kmhmu' (Kmhmu' Khwen)[3][4]
Glottolog	khmu1255 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/khmu1255)[5]

Contents

Dialects

Approximate location of Khmu dialects in Laos

As a minority language with no standardizing influence, many dialects have evolved. Dialects differ primarily in consonant inventory, existence of register, and the degree to which the language has been influenced by the surrounding national language(s). Dialects are, for the most part, mutually intelligible; however communication can be difficult between speakers of geographically distant dialects.

The dialects of Khmu can be broadly categorized into two groups, **Western Khmu** and **Eastern Khmu**.

- **Western Khmu dialects** have fewer consonant phonemes and instead use phonemic register contrast, as seen in other Austroasiatic languages, of "lax" breathy register and "tense" modal register. In at least one dialect of Western Khmu, known as *Khmu Rook*, tonogenesis is evident as the register contrast has developed into a system of two phonetic tones with six phonemic realizations.[7]

- **Eastern Khmu dialects** show the opposite tendency. Completely lacking either register or tone distinction, these dialects utilize a three-way distinction of stops (voiced, voiceless and aspirated voiceless) and nasals (voiced, voiceless, and pre-glottalized) in the syllable-initial position for phonemic contrast.[8]

Suwilai Premsrirat (2002)

Suwilai Premsrirat (2002)[9] reports the following locations and dialects of Kmhmu' in Laos, Vietnam, China, and Thailand.

- Laos: spoken in the 8 northern provinces of Luang Namtha, Udomsai, Bokeo, Sayaburi, Phongsali, Luang Prabang, and Xiaq kvaaq, with a few villages near Vientiane. Dialects include **Kmhmu' Rook**, **Khmu Lw**, and **Kmhmu' Cwaq** (also known as **Kmhmu' Uu**).
- Vietnam: Kim Hua, Sop Pot, Sop Caw and Pung Kamong Villages, Kim Da Subdistrict, Tương Dương District, Vinh City, Nghệ An Province. Also in Lai Châu Province, Sơn La Province, and Thanh Hóa Province.
- China: Pung Soa village (more conservative with voicing contrasts in the initial consonants) and Om Kae village (has tonal contrasts) in Sipsongpanna, Yunnan
- Thailand: many villages, including the representative datapoint of Huay Yen village, Wieng subdistrict, Chiang Khong District, Chiang Rai Province (originally from Pak Bang district of Laos, where the language is called Khmu Khrong, meaning 'Mekong Khmu'). Also in Nan Province and Lampang Province.

Phonology

Consonants

The consonant inventory of Kmhmu' is shown in the table below. The phonemes in the colored cells are particular to the dialects of Eastern Khmu. The phoneme /f/, present in dialects of both Eastern and Western Kmhmu', is a result of borrowings from the surrounding Tai languages.[10]

		Labial	Alveolar		Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	**Aspirated**	pʰ	tʰ		cʰ	kʰ	
	Voiceless	p	t		c	k	ʔ
	Voiced	b	d		ɟ	g	
Nasal	**Voiceless**	m̥	n̥		ɲ̥	ŋ̥	
	Voiced	m	n		ɲ	ŋ	
	Preglottalized	ʔm	ʔn		ʔɲ	ʔŋ	
Fricative	**Voiceless**	(f)	s				h
Approximant	**Voiceless**	w̥*	l̥	r̥	j̥		
	Voiced	w	l	r	j		
	Preglottalized	ʔw			ʔj		

*w̥ is technically a voiceless labio-velar approximant

Vowels

The vowels of Kmhmu' show little variation across the dialects with all varieties having 19 monophthongs and three diphthongs (/iə/, /ɨə/ and /uə/).[7]

	Front		Central		Back	
	short	long	short	long	short	long
Close	/i/	/iː/	/ɨ/	/ɨː/	/u/	/uː/
Close-mid	/e/	/eː/	/ə/	/əː/	/o/	/oː/
Open-mid	/ɛ/	/ɛː/		/ʌː/	/ɔ/	/ɔː/
Open			/a/	/aː/		

See also

- Khmuic languages
- Khmu people
- List of Khmu plant common names
- List of Khmu animal common names

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External links

- http://projekt.ht.lu.se/rwaai RWAAI (Repository and Workspace for Austroasiatic Intangible Heritage)
- http://hdl.handle.net/10050/00-0000-0000-0003-66EA-B@view Khmu in RWAAI Digital Archive
- Database of audio recordings in Khmu - basic Catholic prayers (http://dominicweb.eu/en/endictionaries/exotic-languages-prayers?kjg)